

# OUR GAELIC PROVERBS

*A MIRROR OF THE PAST*

"An t-a-a chi's nach-fhaic"

BY



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## OUR GAELIC PROVERBS : A MIRROR OF THE PAST.\*

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THE idea still prevails in the Lowlands of Scotland and across the Border that in the past the Highlands and Islands of Scotland were peopled by a race uncivilised and semi-barbarous, revelling in bloodshed and plunder, and speaking a language in keeping with their supposed sociological condition.

Such a misconception can readily be disposed of by the study of history based on sound, scientific research, embracing in an unbiased manner the whole kingdom of Scotland, Highlands and Lowlands alike.

Scottish history, as taught, even to-day, in our own schools and universities, cannot be regarded as truly national. It is lopsided, because viewed largely from one angle—the Lowlands of Scotland.

Thanks to the enlightened policy of the Scottish History Society, the history of Scotland is now for the first time being treated, not as the history of any particular part of the Kingdom, but of Scotland as a whole.

In this connection it is gratifying to note that in the Highlands, for the past couple of decades or so, we have been fortunate in having able local historians investigating the facts, and compiling Highland history on scientific lines, their materials being culled from local sources found mainly in the charter and muniment rooms of our old Highland aristocracy.

Our Scottish Education Department and our four Universities could materially assist in this laudable attempt to free Scottish history from geographical bias, the former by making Scottish national history compulsory in the leaving certificates, and the latter by encouraging Scottish national

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history, not only among their ordinary pass degree students, but, especially, among their honours and research students.

As scientific historical research has proceeded, the mists of crass ignorance regarding the Highlands in the past are being rapidly dispelled, thus allowing the truth of the familiar Ossianic exhortation to stand out in true and bold relief, "Cuimhnich air na daoine bho'n d' tháinig thu" (Remember those you came from), a sentiment which has inspired the Scottish Celts on many a battlefield to follow in the footsteps of their fathers.

It must, nevertheless, be remembered that history, however carefully written, can never be entirely free from individual bias. It is humanly impossible to be otherwise; and, although the historical discoveries that have recently been made, must be gratifying to the members of a society such as ours, we must not rest entirely satisfied with historical findings alone, but endeavour to widen our field of vision, and see what can be gleaned in other directions of human activities as to what manner of men our forefathers were.

Let us look at the Fine Arts, such as sculpture, one of the severest tests that can be applied in determining the attainments of a race. Have we anything to show in this direction, and, if so, how does the Celtic race in Scotland compare with other contemporaneous races?

Here in this County of Angus, and within a few miles of Dundee, several beautiful examples of sculptured stones are to be found, *e.g.*, at Glamis, Aberlemno, Dunnichen, and St. Vigean's. The Celtic stones of Angus cannot be surpassed for beauty of design and artistic merit. They date back to about the eighth century A.D., and conclusively prove that a race which encouraged such artistic productions must have taken a high place among the civilised peoples of the earth. These Celtic crosses of Angus, and many others met with throughout Celtic Scotland, prove that there was a civilisation in those far-off days which compared very favourably with that of any other contemporary race inhabiting Western Europe.

Again, let us see what music has to say in support of our contention. This you must admit is also a very severe test of the attainments of a race.

Our Highland, and especially our Hebridean, music is one of the musician's greatest treasures, not merely for its historic value, which is great, but for its own intrinsic worth, which is incalculable. It shows an amazing similarity in all its qualities to that school of atmospheric music

captained by Debussy. By some almost miraculous means, Gaelic civilisation evolved a music which anticipates by centuries what is, perhaps, the most significant development of music in modern years.

The folk-music of the Highlands and Western Isles is quite unlike the folk-music of any other nation, being not a rude, barbarous beginning, but a smooth, well-polished end, perfectly developed and consummately expressed.

As regards the authorship of our Celtic melodies nothing is known. They appear to be of communal rather than of individual origin, of native and not of exotic growth—in short, they may be said to represent the spiritual expression or ethos of the race.

Speaking of the Hebridean songs, it is interesting to remember that Mr. Ernest Newman, the well-known musical critic, has said that not once in a hundred years is there a composer born with such melodic invention as that found in the best of our Hebridean airs. This is surely a great compliment, especially when we recollect that most of these songs are many centuries older than the origin of written music.

What have we to say regarding our Gaelic language and literature? It is true that the Celts of Scotland in far-off times could neither read nor write, but in this respect they could claim no monopoly, for this disability applied equally to other races all over the world.

The art of reading and writing was confined almost exclusively to the cloister, and, judging by the missals and manuscripts that have been preserved to us from this source, they show a high degree of design, dexterity, and intelligence, which is creditable to their authors, *e.g.*, the Book of Deer, and the valuable and interesting collection of manuscripts preserved in the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. Besides, we have good reason to believe that illuminated missals and manuscripts were once plentiful throughout Celtic Scotland, but, to our great regret, most of these have been destroyed or lost, mainly during the Norse invasions, and the great upheavals at the time of the Scottish Reformation.

The Irish Celts, on the other hand, were more fortunate in that they did not suffer to the same extent from Norse depredations, and so the Book of Kells, and other priceless and artistic works on vellum and in metal, are to-day their much-prized possessions.

Although the number of our missals and manuscripts is somewhat scanty, we are fortunate in having a unique and

valuable collection of Gaelic proverbs and familiar sayings, from which accredited source we can evaluate the basic psychology, philosophy, and manners of the Celtic race in bygone times. As has just been said, most of our printed or written matter relating, or belonging, to the past has almost entirely disappeared, but the living tongue, which cannot readily be silenced, has transmitted through successive generations the proverbs of our race. “ ‘S e ‘m bial a dh’ obas mu dheireadh” (The mouth gives in last). This brings me, then, to the main theme of my address—

#### OUR GAELIC PROVERBS : A MIRROR OF THE PAST.

Our proverbs and familiar sayings date from prehistoric and Druidical times down through the centuries. They are mostly old, and, like our sculpture and music, of native growth, therefore, of the utmost value as an index of the characteristics of the Celtic race in Scotland. Being unintentional, they are the more truthful in revealing the peculiarities, habits, thoughts, and ideas of our race. Their origin is unknown, yet it is certain they are not the product of one person or of any grade of society. They may truly be said to reflect the synthetic wisdom and folly of our race.

In the preface to his valuable collection of “Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Sayings,” Sheriff Nicolson says— “These old Gaelic sayings reflect a high moral standard, an intelligence shrewd and searching, a singular sense of propriety and grace, and, what may be considered one of the tests of intellectual rank and culture, a distinct sense of humour never found among savages and clodhoppers.”

“These Gaelic proverbs give very little indication of those ferocious traits which ignorance or prejudice is apt to regard as specially characteristic of our Celtic ancestors. They express very few sentiments of which any muscular Christian can disapprove. Their view of human nature is keen but kindly, critical but not contemptuous. The number of them that can be condemned on the score of morals or taste is singularly small, more than can be said for the proverbs of several great nations.”

It is natural that in some of our Gaelic proverbs and familiar sayings one can discern ideas similar to those met with in the proverbs of other races; but from internal evidence we may safely infer that most of the proverbs current in Celtic Scotland down to our own time are native.

The late Dr. Cameron Gillies, a former president of the Caledonian Medical Society, while discussing this point some

years ago, assured me that most of our Scottish proverbs are direct translations of the Gaelic proverbs. This can easily be understood when we remember that up to the reign of Malcolm iii (Calum Cean mór), who reigned from 1058 to 1093, Gaelic was not only the vernacular speech of the people of the greater part of Scotland, but also the language of the Scottish Court. After King Malcolm's second marriage, Gaelic was naïvely expelled from Court mainly through the skilful solicitation of his shrewd and subtle spouse, the Saintly Queen Margaret of Scotland, and its place usurped by her alien English tongue, Malcolm the warrior—not the politician—quietly acquiescing in this drastic innovation. This, however, was only one of the many changes that took place as the result of this Scoto-Anglican union, a union which began like a romantic, or fairy tale, but which ended in a national transformation, which in time affected every side of Scottish national life, leaving Scotland not only with a new language, but with a new race of rulers, new modes of worship, and new manners and customs. We are told that Queen Margaret used her captivating influence to modify the constitution of the Scottish Kirk, so as to bring it into conformity with her Anglican views. The ultimate effect of her meddling in political affairs was the disappearance, for better or for worse, of Celtic civilisation from the Lowlands of Scotland. Whether this sweet lady has rightly earned the designation of Saint, I know not, but there can be no doubt she played the *rôle* of politician effectively.

Be that as it may, Queen Margaret's influence at the Scottish Court had a far-reaching national effect. Gaelic, as the vernacular speech of the people, gradually, almost imperceptibly, receded northwards and westwards, and, having lost royal and legislative patronage, was left, presumably, to die a natural death. This lethal process has gone on for over eight centuries, yet the language survives. According to last census (1921), there were 158,779 Gaelic-speaking persons, who could speak Gaelic and English, and 9,829 were returned as speaking Gaelic alone. "An air is more lasting than the voice of the birds." "A word is more lasting than the riches of the world."

It was stated somewhere recently that Gaelic had now reached the twilight. Let us hope the twilight referred to is not the twilight of the evening that leads to darkness, but the twilight of the morning that leads to dawn.

During these centuries of neglect, Gaelic has, nevertheless, remained the favourite, and in many instances the only,

language of the people occupying certain parts of the Highlands. In an upland glen some 900 feet above sea level near the north-east end of Loch Ness, where I spent my boyhood, it was my privilege and delight to speak English and Gaelic with equal fluency, Gaelic being spoken almost universally there. Looking back to those early days, what impressed me greatly was the frequent use made of Gaelic proverbs in ordinary conversation and discussion. By long usage they became authoritative all over Scottish Celtdom, which is evidenced by the fact that by the skilful introduction of an apt proverb an argument could promptly and effectively be short-circuited without giving offence. The last word, so to speak, was said, nobody daring to question their authority. Indeed, these proverbs were regarded as the loadstone of the life and work and destiny of our Gaelic-speaking people.

A careful study of the proverbs and familiar sayings, especially in their original garb, should show succinctly how our ancestors lived and moved and had their being. By their illuminating rays we can get a sharply focused picture of the manners and customs, the wisdoms and superstitions, the wit and nonsense of the Celtic race in Scotland in bygone days. They are interesting alike to the historian, the philosopher, the psychologist and the sociologist. They were made use of freely among our Gaelic-speaking kith and kin, notably around the blazing peat fires of a winter's evening, where neighbours and inmates gathered together for happy intercourse and mutual edification. These Highland ceilidhs, as they are called, were in large measure the schoolrooms of the past, where people of all ages gave and received information regarding the various facets of human life, mainly through the medium of Gaelic proverbs aptly introduced. At these ceilidhs anything of the nature of gossip or slander I never heard. Everything said and done was above reproach. Song and story were frequently heard, and my recollection leads me to believe that these Highland ceilidhs exercised a far-reaching influence on the youth and manhood of the clachan and country side, especially as regards the formation of character and personality.

If the Gaelic language as a spoken tongue disappear from our Highlands and Islands, the great controlling and formative influence of our time-honoured and racial code of morals and ethics will cease to be effective, to the detriment of our Highland people.

The first collection of Gaelic proverbs and phrases was made by the Rev. Donald MacIntosh, an Atholl man, who

designated himself in his last will and testament—“ I, the Reverend Donald MacIntosh, a priest of the old Scots Episcopal Church, and last of the non-jurant clergy in Scotland.” The book was first published in Edinburgh in 1785, and a second edition appeared in 1819. The number of proverbs in the first edition was 1,305, in the second 1,538. In 1881 Sheriff Nicolson, that erudite and big-hearted *Sgiathanach*, published “ A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases,” numbering nearly 4,000—a scholarly publication. Besides these we have the Rev. Dr. Alexander Cameron’s “ Gaelic Proverbs and Familiar Phrases ” in vol. ii of “ Reliquiae Celticae,” and many interesting Gaelic proverbs are to be found in “ The Literature of the Celts,” by Dr. Magnus MacLean, while in February, 1926, Mr. T. D. MacDonald, a well-known Gaelic author, published his collection, numbering 648, a very convenient and interesting book.

As most of you here do not speak Gaelic I purpose reading to you some old Gaelic proverbs and familiar sayings translated into English from the original to show you the many view-points of human life and experience embraced by them, leaving the proverbs to speak for themselves as to what manner of men and women our ancestors were. The translations I purpose giving are taken almost entirely from Nicolson’s collection, and, although they are very fine indeed, they, as he himself says in his preface, come far short of the originals, so please make due allowance for this obvious and unavoidable disparity.

#### THE DEITY—FATALISM—REPENTANCE—THE CLERGY.

We can readily gather from our Gaelic proverbs that the Scottish Celts were disposed to be religious, influenced, as they must have been, by their special, awe-inspiring environment—the everlasting hills, the boundless ocean. Curiously enough, even in my young days, Highland people seldom spoke of sacred things.

The fatalism of the Celts is associated with an omnipotent, but just, God; but the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God is not indicated in any of the proverbs that I have come across. As regards repentance, no eleventh-hour opportunity is afforded, and purchasing repentance is regarded as folly. Nature never forgives, *Lex talionis*, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, being the prevailing system of punishment.

In our proverbs there is a religion indicated, whose creed

resembles the main tenets of the early Greek and Hebrew religion. It is unquestionably Necessitarian, implying a firm belief that

“ There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.”

It may be noted in passing that in Celtic mythology the devil is generally spoken of as a mean rascal, not the expectant and willing dispenser of fire and brimstone as taught and preached in my young days; and Hell, his dwelling-place, is not hot but cold.

An ni a gheall Dia, eha inheall duine (What God has promised man cannot baulk).

Is gearr gach reachd aeh riaghait Dhe (Short-lived is all rule but the rule of God).

Cha d’òrdaich Dia do ‘n duine bhoehd an dà latha cho ole (Two days alike ill, God to poor men doth not will).

Cha bhi suaimhneas aig éueoir, no seasamh aig drochbheairt (Wrong cannot rest, nor ill deed stand).

Is maирg a chuireas farran air fann (Woe to him who vexes the weak).

Mar a chàireas duine a leabaidh, ‘s ann a laidheas e (As a man makes his bed, so must he lie).

Tha ‘fhàgail fhéin aig gach neach (Everyone has his fate).

Is éigin dol far am bi ‘n fhoid (One must go where his grave awaits him).

Cha leighis aithreachas breamas (Repentance won’t cure mischief).

Is ionann aithreachas-eriche ‘s a bhi ‘eur sìl mu Fheill-Màrtainn (Death-bed repentance is sowing seed at Martinmas).

Is amaireach a bhi ‘eur a mach airgid a cheamaich aithreachais (‘Tis folly to spend money in buying repentance).

Cha dubhhairt Dia na thubhaint thusa (God hath not said all thou hast said). This refers to the clergy, and may be regarded as a direct rebuke to theological infallibility.

Cha deanar sagart gun fhoghluim, ‘s eha dean foghluim sagart (A priest should be learned, but learning won’t make a priest). It is interesting to note that in those far-off days the education of the clergy was considered important.

#### MORALS—GENERAL.

In the proverbs under this heading a very high standard of morality is inculcated, any departure therefrom being followed by condign punishment.

Is sàmhach an obair dol a dholaidh (Going to ruin is silent work).

Is duilich bùrn glan a thoirt à tobar salach (It's difficult to draw pure water from a dirty well).

Cha tig smaointeann glan á eridhe salach (Clean thoughts come not from a foul heart).

Dean math 'an aghaidh an uile (Do good against the ill).

Thoir tachd do'n mhath, 'us math an t-ole (Love the good and forgive the bad).

Fuilingidh gach beathach a bhi gu math aeh mae an duine (Every creature but man can bear well-being).

Is don' an leisgeul a' mhisg (Drunkenness is a bad excuse).

#### TRUTH AND FIDELITY.

Is feàrr an fhìrinn na 'n t-òr (Truth is better than gold).

Is feàrr a bhi bochd na 'bhi briagach (Better be poor than a liar).

Is maирg air nach bi eagal na bréige (Woe to him that fears not to lie).

Am fear a gheallas 's e 'dh 'iocas (He that promises must pay).

Is fiach air duine na gheallas e (A man's promise is a debt).

Cha'n'eil fealladh ann is mò na gealladh gun choimhgealladh (There is no greater fraud than the promise unfulfilled).

Fear nach reic 's nach ceannaich a' chòir (A man who will neither sell nor buy the right).

#### CHARACTER AND COURAGE.

In the proverbs under these headings, character is clearly delineated; and, as regards courage, it is interesting to note in passing that there is no word for coward in the Gaelic language.

Mar a chaitheas duine a bheatha, bheir e breith air a choimhhearsnach (As a man leads his life, so he judges his neighbour).

Is ann mar a bhios neach e fhéin a dh' fhidireas e 'choimhhearsnach (As a man is himself he thinks of his neighbour).

Fear nach euir cùl ri 'charaid no ri 'namhaid (A man that won't turn his back on friend or foe).

Am fear nach teich, teichead roimhe (He that flees not will be fled from).

Is mios' an t-eagal na 'n cogadh (Fear is worse than fighting).

Na sir 's na seachain an eath (Nor seek nor shun the fight). This is the same advice that Polonius gave to his son Laertes: " Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but being in, bear't that the opposed may beware of thee " (*Hamlet*, i. 3).

### SELF-RESPECT—SENSE OF HONOUR.

Our proverbs inculcate a very high standard.

Is beò duine 'an déigh a shàrachadh, ach cha bheò e 'an déigh a nàrachadh (A man may survive distress, but not disgrace).

Aithniehear duine air a chuideachd (A man will be known by his company).

Cha'n uisle mac righ na 'chuideachd (A king's son is no nobler than his company).

Ain fear a laidheas 's a' pholl togaidh e 'n làthach (He who lies in the mud will rise dirty).

Air fhad 's ge'n téid thu' mach, na toir droch sgéul dhachaidh ort fhéin (However far you go abroad, bring home no ill tale of yourself).

Cha'n fhuing an onoir elùd (Honour can't bear patching).

Na tarruing mi gun aobhar, 's na pìll mi gun chliù (Draw me not without cause, nor return me without honour). The sword.

### BENEVOLENCE—GENEROSITY.

Is maирg nach beathaich a thruaghan (Woe to him that won't maintain his own poor one). The Gaelic phrase " Is maирg " translated " woe to " implies something of the nature of a curse that will follow him and his family by way of retribution.

Is maирg a chuireas air chùl a dhaoine fhéin (Woe to him who turns his back on his own people).

Cha'n mhisde gnìomh math a dheanann da uair (A good deed is not the worse of being done again). Δις καὶ τρὶς τὰ καλά.

An fành a bheir 's i a gheabh (The hand that gives is the hand that gets).

Is faoiliidh duine a chuid a thairgse, ged is fheaird 'e aige fhéin e (He is the more generous who offers his own, though he would be the better of keeping it).

Coinnichidh caoinhneas do mhathair thu 'n uair nach coinnich i thèin thu (Your mother's kindness will meet you when she herself cannot meet you). This proverb is common in the island of Gigha, and was given to me by the Rev. Donald Macfarlane, the saintly minister of the parish, a few years before his lamented death.

## TEMPERANCE.

Moderation as regards food and drink has always been a Highland characteristic. Whisky, as a beverage in the Highlands, is comparatively recent. It was scarcely known before the 'Forty-Five, claret and ale being the popular drinks of our forefathers, according to their station in life. The term "Uisge beatha" occurs only once in Nicolson's large collection.

Thoir do phathadh do'n allt, mar a ni an cù (Take your thirst to the stream, as the dog does).

Teannaich do chrios gus am faigh thu biadh (Tighten your belt till you get food).

Deireadh féille fág (Leave the fag-end of a fair).

## HUMILITY.

Humility is a virtue highly extolled among our Highland people. What could be more noble than the following?—

Is i an dias a 's truime a 's isle 'chromas a ceann (The heaviest ear of corn bends its head lowest).

Suidh gu h-íosal, 'us diol gu h-uasal (Sit lowly, and pay nobly).

## COURTESY AND HOSPITALITY.

So far as my observations go, courtesy and hospitality are inherent in the Highland character. "A Highland welcome" is proverbial.

Am fear a bhios modhail, bidh e modhail ris a' h-uile duine (He that is courteous will be courteous to all).

Furain an t-aoiðh a thig, greas a t-aoiðh 'tha 'falbh (Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest).

Is sona gach euid an comaidh; is maírg a chromadh 'n a aonar (Happy is that which is shared; pity him who fares alone).

Is cuinge brù na biadh (There is more food than room for it). A hospitable table.

Is mòid rud a roinn (A thing is the bigger of being shared).

Bha dorus Fhinn do 'n àmraich fial (Fingal's door was free to the needy).

Cha'n fhiach cuirm gun a còmhradh (A feast is worth nothing without its conversation). This familiar Gaelic saying implies a high sociological and intellectual standard, surely.

## MEN AND WOMEN—LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

Gaelic proverbs, unlike the proverbs of France and Italy, testify equally to the high character of our people. Women were always held in the highest respect, and were never considered inferior to men. Foreign proverbs abound, as Nicolson says, in insinuations against priests and women.

Am fear a phòsas bean pòsaidh e dragh (He that marries a wife marries trouble). This is the only Gaelic proverb I know of which speaks somewhat disparagingly of wedlock, but the following proverb should prove a direct antidote.

Is mìne min na gràm,  
Is mìne mnài na fir  
(Meal is finer than grain,  
Women are finer than men).

Is fhearr bean ghlie na erann is fearann (Better a wise wife than plough and land).

Am fear a labhras ole mu 'mhnaoi, tha e 'eur mìchliù air fhéin (Who speaks ill of his wife dishonours himself).

Fior no breuge, millear bean leis (True or false, 'twill injure a woman).

Is coma leam an rud nach toigh leam, eireagan a' dol 'n an coilich (I like not pullets becoming cocks).

Is i 'n ailleantaichd maise nam ban (Modesty is the beauty of women).

Air an dorus air an tig an harbns a steach, théid gràdh a mach (Where doubt comes in, love goes out).

## CHILDREN.

Is maирg aig am bì iad; 's maирg aig nach bì iad (Pity those who have them; pity those who haven't them). Children, obviously, are referred to.

Is ann air an tràghadh a rugadh e (He was born when the tide was ebbing). The old man's bairn!

An ni 'chì na big 's e 'mì na big (What the little ones see, the little ones do).

Is ionna eron a bhios air leamhain gu mhàthair (The motherless child will have many faults).

An leanabh a dh' fhàgar dha fhéin  
Cuiridh e 'mhàthair gu nàire  
(The child that's left to himself  
Will put his mother to shame).

An ni 'chluimeas na big, 's e 'chamas na big (What the little ones hear, the little ones say).

### HOME AND KINDRED.

Am fear a's fhaidhe 'chaidh o'n tigh, 's e'n eeòl 'bu bhinne chual e riamh "tiugainn dachaidh" (To him that farthest went away the sweetest music he ever heard was "come home").

Mar faigh fear d' a dhùthach, 's math leis a bhi ma 'coinneaubh (If a man can't get to his country, or home, it's good to be in sight of it).

Cuimhnich air na daoine bho 'n d'thàinig thu (Remember those you came from). Ossianic.

Lean gu dlùth ri eiliù do shìnnse (Follow close the fame of your fathers). Fingal's advice to his son Oscar.

Is buaine dùthchas na oilean (Blood is stronger than breeding). Nature is greater than nurture.

Clanna nan Gàidheal 'an guaillibh a chéile (The clans of the Gael shoulder to shoulder).

### FRIENDSHIP.

Is math an sgàthan sùil caraide (A friend's eye is a good looking-glass).

Cha nigh na tha dh' uisge 's a' mhuir ar cairdeas (All the water in the sea can't wash out our friendship).

Cha deamar leas caraid gun saothair (Friend can't be helped without trouble).

Call caraid' taghal tric, 's call caraid' taghal ainnig (Friends are lost by calling often, and by calling seldom).

Is suarach an cairdeas a dh' fhéumas a shiòr cheannach (It's poor friendship that must be constantly bought).

Comhairle caraid' gun a h-iarraidh 's i 's fhiach a gleidheadh (A friend's advice unmasked is well worth keeping).

Is treasa dithis 's an átha gun 'bhi fada bho chéile (Two crossing the ford are best near each other).

Na diobair caraid 's a charraid (Forsake not a friend in the fray).

Cha do thréig Fionn riamh caraid a làimhe deise (Fingal never forsook his right-hand friend). Fingal is our great Ossianic hero.

## CAUTION—SILENCE—WORDS—DEEDS—APPEARANCES.

Na séid sop nach urrainn dut fhéin a chuir as (Kindle not a fire which you can't put out).

Is móir am faical nach tiochd 's a' bhial (It's a big word that the mouth can't hold).

Is math an fhiacal a bhi roimh 'n teanga (It is well that the teeth are before the tongue).

Na abair aeh beag 's abair gu math e (Say but little, and say it well).

Is coma leam fear-fuadain 's e luath labhar (I don't like a stranger who talks loud and volubly). A very Highland conception.

Is ann air gnùis a bheirear breith (It is by the face we judge).

Is tric a bha gaoid 'an ubhal bòidbeach (Often has flaw been in a fair apple).

Na toir breith a réir coltais; faodaidh eridhe beairteach 'bhi fo chòta bochd (Judge not by appearance; a rich heart may be under a poor coat).

Is minig a bha claidheamh math 'an droch thruaill (Good sword has often been in poor scabbard).

Na creid gu'r h-aithne dhut duine, gus an roimh sibh creach (Don't suppose that you know a man till you come to divide a spoil with him).

Air mhùnd 's a their na slòigh, cha ghlòir a dhearbas aeh gnìomh (For all the world can say, not words but deeds are proof).

Bial a labhmas, aeh gnìomh a dhearbas (The mouth speaks, but the deed proves).

## PRUDENCE—PATIENCE—PERSEVERANCE—PRACTICE.

Far nach bi na mic-uehd, cha bhi na fir-fheachd (Where there are no boys in arms, there will be no armed men). Highland depopulation!

Am fear nach gléidh na h-airm 's an t-sith, cha bhi iad aig 'an am a' chogaidh (He that keeps not his arms in time of peace will have none in time of war). Sound policy and statesmanship are implied here.

Is fhearr sgios chas na sgios meannu (Better weary foot than weary spirit).

Is maирg a chuireas a chuid far nach urrainn da a toirt as (Pity him who puts his means where he can't get it out). Valuable advice, especially when purchasing property.

## HUMOROUS SAYINGS.

“ Tha biadh 'us eedh 'an seo,” ‘mu'n dubhaint a' madadh-ruadh, 's e 'ruith air falbh leis a' phìob (“ There's meat and music here,” as the fox said, when he ran away with the bagpipe).

Is mór am beothach nach tiochd a muigh (It's a big beast that there isn't room for outside).

Mhill e troich 's cha d' rinn e duine (He spoiled a dwarf and didn't make a man).

An taoman na's mò na'n long (The baler bigger than the boat).

Ma 's math leat do mholadh, faigh bàs; ma 's math leat do chàineadh, pòs (If you wish to be praised, die; if you wish to be decried, marry).

Is duine còir e, 's na iarr a chuid (He's a fine man, if you don't ask of him). Delicate Celtic irony.

Ge beag an t-ubh thig ian as (Though the egg be small, a bird will come out of it).

Cha d' thàinig ubh mór riamh bho'n dreathainn-donn (Large egg never came from the wren).

An gog mór 's an t-ubh beag (Loud cackle, little egg).

## POETICAL SAYINGS.

Is gorm na enuic 'tha fada uainn (Green are the hills that are far from us).

Is math am buachail an oidhche; bheir i dhachaidh gach beothach 'us duine (Night is a good herd; she brings all creatures home).

Is blàth anail na màthar (Warm is the mother's breath).

Is bràthair do'n chadal ceann ri lär (Head laid down is brother to sleep).

Is fhearr aon ian 's an làimh, na 'dhà dhiag air iteig (A bird in the hand is worth a dozen on wing).

Cho geal ri sneachd na h-aon oidhche (As white as the one night's snow). “ Pure as the virgin snow.”

Is binn gach ian 'n a dhoire fhéin (Sweet sings each bird in his own grove). “ There's no place like home.”

Is bòidheach an luchag 's a' mhìr arbhair (Pretty is the mouse in the corn-plot). Reminds one of Burns.

## EDUCATION—KNOWLEDGE.

According to the Jesuit system, the best teachers are to be found in the infant schoolrooms. The far-seeing wisdom of this method is confirmed by recent researches in genetic psychology. There are certain centres in the brain which, if not stimulated before a certain age, remain more or less dormant throughout life. Hence the importance of early and highly efficient teaching, as opposed to the old dame's school, it being believed that any sort of teacher is good enough for very young children. Our proverbs inculcate many sane and up-to-date views on education.

Is e 'n t-ionnsachadh òg an t-ionnsaeadh bòidheach (The early learning is the pretty learning).

Is ann fhad 's a bhios an t-slat maoth is phasa 'lùbadh (When the twig is tender it is easiest bent).

An leanabh nach foghlum thu ri d' ghlùm, eha'n fhoghlum thu ri d' chluais (The child whom you teach not at your knee, you won't teach at your ear).

Cha'n e na lèughar a ni foghlumte ach na chumhnichear (Not what's read but what's remembered makes learned).

Is trúim an éire an t-aimealas (Ignorance is a heavy burden).

Is trúim fear an eòlais (The man that knows is powerful).

## PHILOSOPHY.

Ge b'e nach fuiling dochair, eha 'n fhaigh e soeair (He gets no ease who suffers not). This is practically equivalent to the Platonic doctrine of Pleasure and Pain.

Is glice an saoghal a thuiginn na 'dhìteadh (Better understand the world than condemn it). A fine philosophic sentiment.

Is fherar an rathad fada glan na 'n rathad goirid salah (Better the long clean road than the short dirty one). Getting rich too quickly.

Is ann aig duine fhéin is fhéarr a tha fios e' àite am beil a blhròg 'g a ghoirteachadh (Every man knows best where his shoe hurts him).

Bidh an t-ubhal a 's fhéarr air a' mheangan a 's àirde (The best apple is on the highest bough).

A' bheinn a 's àirde tha's an tìr, 's ann oirre 's trice 'chi thu 'n eeò (The highest hill is oftenest covered with clouds). “Like some tall cliff” (Goldsmith's *Village Preacher*).

## PROMPTNESS—PUNCTUALITY—EARLY RISING.

Cha stad na tràithean, 's cha 'n 'eil bàigh aig seòlmara  
(Time won't wait, nor tide show mercy).

Dean maorach 'fhad 's a bhios an tràigh ann (Get bait while  
the tide is out).

Gabh an latha math as a thoisearch (Take the good day early).

## HUSBANDRY—TRADE—CRAFTSMANSHIP—INDUSTRY.

Is fhearr caitheamh na meirgeadh (Better wear than rust).

Is ann a dh fhàsas an siol mar a chuirear e (The seed grows  
as it's sown).

Am fear a's fhearr a chuireas 's e 's fhearr a bhuaineas  
(He who sows best reaps best).

Is fhearr lan an duirn de cheaird na lan an duirn de dh-or  
(A handful of trade is better than a handful of gold). A sound  
economic principle.

Cha 'n naisle duine na 'cheaird (No man is above his trade).

Féumaidh an talamh a chuid fhéin (The land must receive  
its own portion). Nicolson thinks this refers to the grave—  
dust to dust; it is more likely to mean good husbandry.

Am fear nach euir a shnaim, caillidh e 'ehiad ghream (He  
that doesn't knot his thread will lose his first stitch).

Is e 'n cleachdadadh a ni teoma (Practice makes expert).  
*μελέτη τὸ πᾶν. Usus promptum fecit.*

## FOOD—THERAPY—PUBLIC HEALTH—SCIENCE.

Cha 'n e na dh' ithean a ni làidir, ach na eilmàinhar (Not  
what's eaten but what's chewed makes strong).

Muin aìr mhuin thig an thrioblaid  
Miamm aìr mliamn thig an t-slàint  
(Troubles come one by one,  
Health will come by force of will).

Psycho-therapy forestalled!

Is sona a chailleach a thig ri linn an fhaothachaidh (Lucky  
is the old wife that comes at the turn of the disease).

Is fheuirde gach eneadh a ceasnachadh (A wound is the  
better of being probed).

Ruigidh an ro-ghiullachd air an ro-ghalar (The best of nursing  
may overcome the worst disease).

Is treasa death-àrach na meath-ghalar (Good nurture overcomes disease). Good nursing and suitable nurture are only now being fully appreciated by the profession.

Is ionna rud a dh 'fleumas an euslaist nach fhéum an 't-sláinte (Sickness needs many things which health requires not).

Gleidhidh cnàimh feòil, fhad 's is beò smior (Bone will keep flesh, while marrow lives).

Is shearr aon tigh air a nighe' na dhà dhiag air an sguabadh (Better one house washed than twelve swept).

Am fear is tuighe clraigean  
Se 's lugha eanchainn  
(He who has the thickest skull  
Has the smallest brain).

Uidh air n-uidh thig an t-sláinte, 's 'n a tonna mór' an easlainte (By degrees comes health, but in great waves comes sickness).

Is fhada bho'n uair sin, bho'n a bha cluas air ròn (It's long since the time when the seal had ears). This old saying suggests that in those far-off times the question of *vestigial remains*, as an adaptation to environment, was not unknown.

#### MANNERS—FOOLS—BOORS.

Cha robh thu a's tigh an uair a chaidh an eiall a roinn (You were not at home when sense was being shared).

Cho cùm ri ionair an aumadain (As crooked as the fool's furrow).

Is fhad' o thigh a' mhodh a rugadh tu (You were born far from the house of good manners).

Is diù nach gabh comhairle, 's is diù 'ghabhas gach comhairle (Who won't take advice is worthless; who takes all advice is the same).

Tha dlùth glie ann, agus inneach gòrach (He has wise warp, but foolish woof).

Is e sgéul an duine bheadaidh na gheabh e 'n tigh a choimhearsnaich (The mannerless man tells what he gets at his neighbour's). An unpardonable offence in the Highlands.

#### GENERAL PROVERBS—PREHISTORIC SAYINGS.

Tha 'n t-seamrag a' pasgadh a còmhdaich, roimh thuiltean dòirteach (The shamrock is folding its garments before heavy rain).

Is duilich am fear nach bi 'n a chadal a dhùsgadh (It is hard to waken him who is not asleep).

Is e 'n dealachadh-beò a ni 'n leòn goirt (Parting with the living makes the sore wound).

Sàil-chuaich 'us bainne ghobhar,  
Suath ri d' aghaidh,  
's cha'n 'eil mae-righ air domhan,  
Nach bi air dò dheaghaidh  
(Wash thy face with lotion  
Of goat-milk and sweet violets;  
There's not a king's son in the world  
But will then run after thee).

The only cosmetic met with in these Gaelic sayings.

Cha d' thug Fionn riamh blàr gun chumha (Fingal never fought a fight without offering terms). Fionn or Fingal was regarded among the Scoto-Irish as the ideal hero-king. Like King Arthur, "He was faithful to his friends, generous to his enemies, mighty in war, gentle and wise in peace."

Thoir' eothronina na Fèinne dhomh (Give me fair play; *i.e.*, one to one).

Cothrom a h-aon (Fair play—one to one).

Cothrom na Fèinne dhaibh—a h-aon (The Fingalian fair play to them—one to one).

Cho teoma ri Coibhi Druidh (As clever as Coivi the Druid).

Ge fagus elach do 'n lár, is faisge na sin cobhair Chiobhi (Though near the stone be to the ground, closer is the help of Coivi).

Deiseal air gach nì (The sunward course with everything). Druidical.

I shall not weary you with any more proverbs, feeling sure I have given you enough material to enable you to form your own opinion as to what manner of men and women our ancestors were.

In science the anthropologist is able to determine from one single bone the morphology of the missing parts, and, by assembling these, reconstruct the whole skeleton, and therefrom deduce the physical habits of the extinct animal.

The ethologist, on the other hand, in dealing with the science of character formation, requires evidence, such as is furnished by the printed or spoken word, in order to determine the ethos or synthesis of the intellectual and moral tendencies of a race.

With regard to our present quest to ascertain the ethos

of the Celtic race in Scotland in the past by the study of their racial proverbs, supported by collateral evidence afforded by history, sculpture and music, we have at our disposal ample material, as compared with the anthropologist, on which to come to a fairly accurate conclusion.

After long and careful study of our Gaelic proverbs in their original setting, I have no hesitation in saying that in Celtic Scotland in the olden times there was a civilisation or ethos which compared very favourably with that obtaining in other countries of Western Europe, and which justifies us, the descendants of the old Scottish Celts, in remembering with gratitude those from whom we came, and in striving proudly to follow close the fame of our fathers.

Cuimhnich air na daoine bho'n d' tháinig thu : Lean gu dlùth ri cliù do shìnnse.





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